

PERSONAL IMMORTALITY.

— • —
JOSIE OPPENHEIM.



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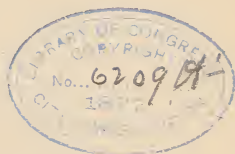
PERSONAL IMMORTALITY

AND

OTHER PAPERS.

BY

JOSIE OPPENHEIM.



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PREFATORY REMARKS.

By many Christians my little book will be looked upon as an intruder, a dispeller of long-cherished dreams, a disturber of the peace of the contented; it will be classed among the new-comers whose right to exist is not yet fully established. It will be asked, Is this not the offspring of malice, for what else could have given it birth?

All charges similar to the above bring their answer with them—they are born of intolerance, and one of the purposes of the following pages is to help overcome this evil.

It is by assuming his rights that the Freethinker has gradually gained a recognition of them, in so far that now he can express himself freely without fear of the stake or dungeon. Still, the boasted liber-

ality of the nineteenth century is in sore need of champions; the day is yet far distant when arguments against popular belief will be listened to with patience and consideration.

You send after us the arrows of accusation, you direct the eyes of prejudice against us, and how else shall we prevent society from ostracising us than by defending ourselves?

You arbitrarily demand belief through faith, through fear of hell, but where, through reason, freedom has been attained, you can never force conviction. Suppose a friend should hand me a piece of chalk, telling me it is gold, I could not believe it so though the bottomless pit yawned at my feet. Many may see in this inability to always believe what is most pleasing, and in particular when applied to religion, submissive slavery, instead of freedom; but the highest freedom to which man can arrive is a willingness to follow the dictates of reason, instead of being controlled by sensuous desires.

I have often heard it questioned whether we have a right to deny what we cannot absolutely disprove : it is argued that because a thing cannot be proved, we have no right to conclude that it is not true.

If we were to believe all that we can not absolutely disprove, there would be no end to credulity : we should have to accept all the wonders of India ; the miracles of all religions, no matter how contradictory ; any tale, however improbable, could be imposed upon us. On the other hand, we should find our knowledge extremely limited did we reject all facts which we cannot directly prove. Fortunately, we are not left entirely without a guide : it is wise to proportion one's belief to the evidence ; to incline to that side which has the balance of testimony, which outweighs the other. In reading the life of Alexander the Great, we are not inclined to doubt either his existence, or his exploits as a general, because these are occurrences not contrary to experience. There is no balance of evidence sufficient to materially affect the testi-

mony. However, we do not hesitate a moment in rejecting the idea that (as the oracle declared) he was the son of the god Jupiter Ammon: this latter partakes of the miraculous; it contradicts sense; it is a violation of the laws of nature, and, as experience has firmly established these laws, the negative side has a very strong support, which nothing on the affirmative side could even equal, excepting that it were possible to have constant recourse to miracles. The same argument may be applied to the miraculous birth of Christ, and the so-called heathen gods.

If an every-day occurrence is related to us, we believe it—we have no reason to do otherwise; but if what is related to us partakes of the wonderful, such as the raising of the dead, the turning of water into wine, anything so improbable requires more than human evidence in order to receive credence.

Unless religionists can make it evident in some tangible way that they have the force of reason, that their side overbalances

all others, they have no right to attempt to impose their peculiar beliefs as binding on others.

It is a common practice for the religious to speak in unmeasured language of the materialist, as being prompted by a hatred of morality, as being devoid of all that is tender and noble: and can they then justly deny us the right of being heard? We would show that our opinions have resulted from pure conviction and love of truth. There still remain to us the same delicate sensibility, the same divine aspirations, the same emotional nature. Our endeavor is to strengthen morality: we cling to virtue, not to creeds, and all the more firmly as we believe that virtue alone can save us. It is necessary to the human race; it is the ladder by which the race has ascended; without it the dignity of man could never have been reached. People have had to take morality in all sorts of disguises in order to make it palatable; surely it is time they should take it for its own sake. As Strauss says: "He likewise, who

still needs expectation of a future recompense as a spring of action, stands in the outer court of morality, and let him take heed lest he fall. For supposing that, in the course of his life, this belief is overthrown by doubt, what then becomes of his morality."

How often, when anything has been said or written that would militate against the belief of the Christian, we hear the outcry that decency, decorum, and good manners forbid. To this we might answer that the like laudable qualities have not prevented him from defaming our character, and consigning us to hell. But far be it from us to be actuated by a feeling of retaliation; study of the laws of nature teaches us to pity more than to blame. However, justice demands a condemnation of that petty selfishness which would have all other lights extinguished, so that the value of its own may be enhanced; which is pained to see its own uncertain glimmerings lost in a more glorious burst of light; which cares only for its own calm of mind, no matter

at what cost of happiness elsewhere. Those who are out of the Church, and others who, though still in it, feel that it no longer affords them a support, that it is crumbling under their feet, need sympathy and help; it is not right to make them stand alone when there are so many kindred souls. What bitter grief it has caused, how many hearts have felt desolate, because people will forget the bond of sympathy that should unite the whole human family. Hopefully, yearningly, we look forward to the time when our cultus will be a universal one, with its tenderness, its hopes, its love of freedom extended to all, and not to any particular sect, country, or class. When the rights of each one, whether of a physical, emotional, or intellectual nature, receive due consideration, then we can say, truly, the Messiah has come.

I sincerely believe that the Church is a necessity to a great majority. I would not rudely disturb their faith in it, nor would I force my ideas upon them. I can appreciate their attachment to what is so

dear to them. No one of tender, earnest disposition can break away from the religion of his fathers without a struggle. It is sad to contemplate the dying of a religion on which so many hopes have rested. If it be asked to what purpose I then give publicity to ideas that tend to destroy the popular belief, I answer concisely as follows :

I. Every system that disdains improvement must in time give way before the irresistible advance of human knowledge. It is impossible, it is futile, to endeavor to conceal the weakness of a religion when it has outlived its usefulness ; besides such an attempt would impede civilization. If we could discard a large share of our knowledge, and could stand intellectually where the Middle Ages stood, perhaps there would be less skepticism. But who does not think himself fortunate in being born in this age, instead of then ?

II. Religions change and pass away, and all over Christendom this change is impending. Society should prepare for the

coming crisis, and this can not be done unless departure from the faith be public and unconcealed.

III. It is the duty of all advocates of liberal thought to exercise their rights ; if they do not, the cause of Freedom will suffer ; she will grow timid, and with her head bowed in the dust, the world will no longer acknowledge her.

IV. The tendency of credulity toward gross superstition is so great, that the doubts of the skeptic should be held up to the light of day, in order to counteract this baneful influence on the human mind. Were this my only reason, it would be sufficient.

V. It is by subjecting all beliefs, without preference, to the scrutiny of reason, that we may hope to arrive at a greater degree of tolerance, truth, and justice. By giving preference to any, either the Christian or other, we are not tolerant, we discard justice, and we injure one of our most glorious pursuits, namely, the search after truth.

I am well aware that it would have been better policy had I clothed my ideas in more popular language ; had I expressed myself more cautiously, vaguely retaining old words and giving them new meanings. The definition which many professed Deists give to the word God is such that any Atheist may believe in the definition. How often we hear such expressions as these: I believe in a something—an All in All, a Force, a Power, the Cosmos—call it what you will. There are many who will admire the wisdom of such language if uttered by any one called a Deist, but the same ideas in the mouth of a Materialist they would find detestable.

I think no one can have reason to doubt my honesty. I have not purposely used words to disguise my thoughts ; neither have I desired that one should have to search a long time to discover my true meaning.

JOSIE OPPENHEIM.

Sparta, Wis., 1876.

PERSONAL IMMORTALITY.

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LETTER NO. I.

FROM LUCIUS TO HERMAN.

THERE should be a nearness, a sympathy and love, between children of the same parents, but a long separation often makes them as strangers to one another. Would it not be well, dear brother, to engage in an epistolary correspondence, in which we share our thoughts with one another as freely as if we were together? I should then know and understand my Herman: I should never misjudge him though I might not agree with him.

Young as I am, I cannot help but feel convinced that the heart and reason undergo many changes; this struck me very forcibly during your short stay with us. We have both undergone a marked intellectual de-

velopment ; our reason has passed through many transitions, and I have no doubt that we have experienced many similar struggles, which have led us to very analogous conclusions. We have not always passed through just the same mental conflicts, nor arrived at exactly the same conclusions : this would be impossible, as no two human beings are alike, neither do they think nor feel alike. On the contrary, I find that there is a vast difference between our thoughts and feelings, more especially in regard to religious subjects ; I sometimes feel an intense longing to bridge over the difference, but not for the world would I land where you have landed ; rather would I persuade you to my still hopeful shore. Occasionally the fear comes over me that I am passing through such phases of intellectual development as will eventually lead me to where you are. No ; this can never be ; I shall never give up my hope of immortality ; this feeling is so strong within me, that at times I think I would prefer hell to annihilation.

During the few weeks you spent with us

I was surprised to learn what harsh religious ideas you entertain; to speak plainly, you do not possess a spark of religion; in your creed, if you have one, the word God is entirely left out; you said yourself you should consider the use of it as a subterfuge on your part. But what is still more inconceivable, how can one so gentle, so affectionate, and, moreover, so ardent in his attachments, give up all hope of being reunited to the beloved dead. If one of your children should die, which God forbid, could you see it laid away in the grave, and feel that you had parted forever? Forgive me, dear brother, if under my rude touch a tender chord trembles and vibrates sadness through your soul; I have every reason to believe that your harsh religious views have not blunted your feelings, and I would not willingly pain one so affectionate. My object in making this personal application is, that you may fully realize and understand your position.

Before proceeding further, I crave your kind indulgence while I endeavor to give

you an insight into the present state of my feelings. Never have subjects pertaining to religion so engaged my attention. Formerly, I was settled in my belief; I thought that the origin of man had been ascertained two thousand years ago; I never doubted that his destiny was either heaven or hell; I never stopped to consider whether, on these subjects, I possessed the truth or not; and, never dreaming of my ignorance, I consequently was not troubled with any harassing doubts. But that is past; my old theology has been sacrificed to reason. Never again can I return and roam over the happy fields of my childhood; their beauty has fled; the torch of reason leads onward, not backward; alas, for me, if it give me nothing in return for what it has taken! It has shown me the darkness of the past; if it lead me not into the light, I am lost indeed.

I have taken the great problems of life and death out of the hands of priests; it is the study of nature and not of the Bible that will help us solve these mysteries.

All the Spring long I watched nature quicken into life under the warming influence of the sun, and now all is rife with interest and beauty. The tangled bank covered with many different kinds of plants and flowers, the sweet scents and sounds of Summer, and a thousand objects, attract and inspire me with the most powerful emotions. But I am not content, as formerly, to recline listlessly on the bank, and indulge my feelings of wonder and admiration: I tear the bark from the trees, and examine the insects that there take refuge, in order the better to assure myself that what naturalists tell us about their protective coloring is true. I dig in the moist earth for worms; I watch the ant and the bee, thereby endeavoring through personal observation to learn more about them. I make every effort to read the book of Nature; vainly hoping to woo her secret from her, and find out what she has in store for me after this life. Read I ever so wrongly, I console myself with the thought that I am doing my best—"Angels could no more."

I do not believe that God does, or ever did, manifest himself through miracles; he speaks to us through and in Nature. "The universe is governed by law," and, relying on the beneficence of the lawgiver, we dare hope that the tendency of these laws is to lead us to the Eternal.

Granted that we can trace our ancestry in the ape, and still farther down, until we are constrained to acknowledge ourselves natural products of the earth. If God, out of inanimate clay, can produce living, breathing, man—man with his wonderful capabilities of pain and of pleasure—who shall say that he cannot also bestow immortality.

Are God and Nature at strife, that our aspirations for something higher and better should never be realized; that the fond dreams of happiness for all, that have been implanted in our bosoms should not be fulfilled? If this be the end, then has God made man in vain, or to satisfy his own love of play, and we can then look upon this earth as nothing more than one of God's wonderful zoological gardens. Who,

for a moment, could harbor such a thought ; are we more noble than our Creator ?

How are we to account for the evil in this world, if it shall not, like some discord which resolves itself into harmony, be resolved into good in the next world ? Experience teaches that the goal of evil is good ; it is by overcoming evil that the race has been developed. Sleep, which robs us of a large share of our lives, we consider the greatest blessing of mankind, and death, which we now look upon with dread, we may yet praise as the good genius who will lead us to the Eternal.

LETTER NO. II.

FROM HERMAN TO LUCIUS.

I HAVE just bestowed the last lingering look on your letter. I need not describe to you the lively interest with which it was read, and the varying emotions it inspired. Gladly will I commune with my dear Lucius, and cement, by every right means in my

power, still more strongly the brotherly tie that binds us.

You have said truly, the heart and reason undergo many changes. This is a world of change—everything is in a state of mutation, and each individual, as well as the whole race, has to traverse different stages of development. How eagerly we grasp the fine threads that lead onward, and, though the paths before us increase in interest and variety, yet do we let fall a tear over the many threads that have dropped from our hands. Do not imagine that the struggles of the individual are lost; it is through the individual that the race must gain.

How like my boyish, passionate Lucius are the words, "At times I think I would prefer hell to annihilation." Now, when, filled with the love of humanity, we feel that all or none will be saved, it is difficult to understand how man could ever contemplate the idea of hell.

It is not alone the good and the beautiful that delights man; he also takes pleasure

in horrors. It is often this that makes him hurry to the theater ; it is this that makes him devour the criminal news. Let a person toward whom the world has felt indifferent commit a great crime, and immediately he inspires an interest in the breasts of thousands. He has not grown more beautiful or good ; on the contrary, it is his very hideousness that attracts. The imagination delights in scenes the reality of which would fill us with grief and despair. No doubt many a devotee has found pleasure in dwelling on the horrors of hell ; he has felt his whole being thrill with enthusiasm as imagination spread her hideous pictures before him ; when the merest glimpse of such a reality would have wrung his heart with sympathy for the poor sufferers.

If death should snatch from me one of my children, or if I should lose one to whom my heart clings with fondest affection, I, being capable of loving, as well as the believer, should feel sorely afflicted. How great my sorrow would be I cannot tell. Now it very naturally seems to me as if

I never could bear such an affliction ; however, my personal feelings can have very little to do with the subject before us.

As long as hearts are tender and loving, they will quiver under each blow that is dealt them. We could not do without the sorrow for the dead—it speaks to us of love ; and

“I hold it true, whate’er befall ;
I feel it, when I sorrow most ;
’Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.”

He is not noble who is insensible to suffering, but he is noble who feels keenly, yet bears his pain with fortitude. How grand is that warm and tender nature that goes out in love toward all mankind, and yet has learned to bear what cannot be changed !

We should know when to be passive and when to be active. If we are threatened with an evil which we can avert, we should strain every nerve, and use every means in our power, to ward it off ; but when the inevitable comes, all struggling is

vain, and we must bow our heads to its decrees. As long as our loved ones are with us, it is well to be active in making them happy, and guarding them, as far as lies in our power, from evil ; but after death has claimed them, if we have not done our duty toward them before, it is then too late. Why do we submit to the loss of relatives and friends? Is it not because there is no remedy, and we are powerless to make it otherwise? To illustrate this I can do no better than to relate part of a Buddhist parable.

“Some time after this, Kisagotami gave birth to a son. When the boy was able to walk by himself, he died. The young girl, in her love for it, carried the dead child clasped to her bosom, and went about from house to house, asking if any one could give her some medicine for it. ‘Is the young girl mad that she carries about on her breast the dead body of her son!’ But a wise man thinking to himself, ‘Alas ! this Kisagotami does not understand the law of death, I must comfort her,’ said

to her, 'My good girl, I cannot myself give medicine for it, but I know of a doctor who can attend to it; Buddha can give medicine; you must go to him.'

"Kisagotami went to Buddha, and, doing homage to him, said, 'Lord and master, do you know any medicine that will be good for my boy?' Buddha replied, 'I know of some; I want a handful of mustard seed, taken from a house where no son, husband, parent, or slave, has died.' The girl went to ask for some at the different houses, carrying the dead body of her son astride on her hip. The people said, 'Here is some mustard seed; take it.' Then she asked, 'In my friend's house has there died a son, a husband, a parent, or a slave?' They replied, 'Lady, what is this that you say! The living are few, but the dead are many.' Then she went to other houses, but one said, 'I have lost a son;' another, 'I have lost my parents;' another, 'I have lost my slave.' At last, not being able to find a single house where no one had died, from which to procure the mustard seed, she began

to think, 'This is a heavy task that I am engaged in. I am not the only one whose son is dead. In the whole of the Savatthi country, everywhere children are dying, parents are dying.' Thinking thus, she was seized by fear, and putting away her affection for her child, she summoned up resolution, and left the dead body in a forest; then she went to Buddha and paid him homage. He said to her, 'Have you procured the handful of mustard seed?' 'I have not,' she replied; the people of the village told me, 'The living are few, but the dead are many.' Buddha said to her, 'You thought that you alone had lost a son; the law of death is that among all living creatures there is no permanence.'"

How deep the truth in this humanely beautiful parable; it speaks to the suffering, and gently bids them to peacefully lay away their dead, for death is not to be struggled against: it does not single out its victims, but claims all alike.

On the subject of immortality, people seem to be divided principally into three

classes: Those who feel convinced that there is a future, and who at any moment can give a graphic description of their limited heaven and bottomless hell. Belonging to the second class, are those who believe that in some inconceivable way the soul of man is immortal, and that somehow, somewhere, we shall all be reunited to the dear departed. Lastly are those who positively do not believe in any hereafter; and this class in reality has the least to fear from death. The first class, those who sing, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," know also that they have the same authority for their hell as they have for their heaven; to be consistent, must they not live in continual dread lest some dear relative or friend be writhing in agony? Very fortunately this class is not apt to be consistent, or there would be only two alternatives left them; either the heart must become so hardened that they can contemplate with pleasure the idea that countless numbers of human beings are to suffer eternal misery; or they must be a constant prey to anxiety in behalf of

some departed sister, brother, parent, or friend. The second class must be harassed by many perplexing doubts; they are not reconciled to the idea that death ends in a dreamless sleep, and they cannot be positive that it is otherwise; for never has the soul of a deceased person reappeared after death, though to do so has been the most earnest dying wish of many persons. Then, again, if they believe in God, they cannot expect that life in another world will be better than in this; for if God has not ruled well in this world, how can they expect him to do better in another world? They must even reflect that perhaps the lot of their immediate relatives and friends is not cast in as pleasant places in the future life as during this life. Many and numerous are the doubts that must suggest themselves as to the fate of the beloved dead.

On the other hand, what can we fear from an eternal, dreamless sleep? Death in this case is a sure panacea for all ills. No matter what misery is heaped upon a mortal body, there is always one remedy left—

death—which ends in “Lethe’s wave,” gives a promise of rest and forgetfulness, and consequently excludes all pain and suffering. We have reason to hope that even in hell, if there were such a place, we could end all by plunging into “Lethe’s wave.” The Materialist (for the present we will so designate the unbeliever in immortality) can inquire into the origin of the human species with as much calmness and as little bias as he would study a pebble or a crystal; he need not be hampered by religious scruples in considering the probability that, in remote ages to come, this earth will go circling around the sun an inert mass, her surface bleak and barren, devoid of all life; he dare go yet farther, and picture to himself a time when perhaps our dear Mother Earth, after having passed through the decrepitude of old age, will renew her youth, and again become a mass of glowing gas. What is there to fear if personal annihilation be true? neither time nor change can affect our eternal rest.

You lament that reason has destroyed

your happy illusions, and you tremble lest it should give you nothing in return for what it has taken. Your own letter shows that it has given you much in return. You should rather rejoice that you are no longer content to remain in ignorance of the truths that are to be found in the wondrous works of Nature. A new world is opened to you, and you should be willing to "pluck the blessed fruit of the tree of knowledge," even if it is at some cost.

The discovery of the New World by Columbus destroyed the illusion that the earth, as revealed in the Scriptures, is of a flat figure. Yet no sane person can shut his eyes to the fact that the New World does exist; nor does it detract from the glory of this great discovery that it has helped to eradicate what some might call harmless error, in order to make way for truth. Is it not the exercise of man's reasoning powers that makes him the crowning work of Nature; and dare he then refrain from the free exercise of his reason, even if its decrees do not always satisfy his sensuous nature?

I now come to that part of your letter where you assume that there is a God. Certainly we may assume many things that we cannot actually prove, but then we must have the balance of evidence in our favor. You have been taught that there is a God, and from this basis you go on and define the attributes of this God, before having brought forth evidence that he even exists. This is a mode of reasoning by which, apparently, you can prove anything. Let us take a few examples from history, and see how it has misled mankind, and how in time of trial it has met with disastrous defeat. The Jews were taught to expect a Messiah; and in former times their faith in the coming of this promised Messiah was as strong as any Theist's belief in God. How easy for any impostor to persuade the believing Jews that he was the Mighty Deliverer whom they with so much certainty expected. During the Middle Ages, when the Jews were pitilessly and sorely persecuted, many pretended Messiahs appeared and gained numerous adherents from all

classes of society. The Jews having taken for granted that what had been taught them concerning a Messiah was true, it was no very difficult task to prove to them that the time was at hand, and that the expected Messiah had at last appeared.

When Galileo taught that the earth moves around the sun, the Church apparently *proved* that such an idea was preposterous, for was it not a doctrine entirely contrary to the Scriptures and tradition? In this way has religion endeavored to prove many things, but how little she has succeeded you well know.

I one day overheard a conversation between your two nephews, which seems to afford an example that may strike you more forcibly than any I can take from history, with which you are already familiar. First, I will say that when your nephews have asked about their origin, they have been given the *explanation* that they were found in the woods. The boys had been carrying on quite an exciting conversation about war, when the younger one startled

his brother by saying, "I saw a war once, and heard the cannons and guns." "Why, no," answered the elder brother; "you never were near a war, and I am going to ask mamma." To this our imaginative darling, nothing daunted, replied, "Well, but, brother, mamma don't know; this was before she found me in the woods." Certainly this was unanswerable. Though your little nephew could not prove that he had witnessed a battle, yet one might not always (providing they take for granted, as he did, that he was found in the woods) be able to disprove it.

LETTER NO. III.

FROM LUCIUS TO HERMAN.

I SEE you have spared no pains in answering my letter—no, you have not even spared my God; and I am unhappy and lost without him. Sweet Ellen, my first and only love, has departed with her parents for Europe. We have uttered the sad,

wild word *farewell*, our hearts stirred with many fears that breathe despair, yet promising, hoping, that all will be well. How I long to say, God protect my darling; time, and time again, the words seem ready to burst from my swelling heart, only to be smothered by the thought that it is but mockery. Is it not hard to leave the fate of my love to chance? Is there no protecting angel whose aid I can invoke? Ah, could I but honestly say, God protect her!

I am desolate; this one feeling so fills my soul that at present I have but little inclination for the task I have undertaken; however, I shall write as often as I am in the humor, and it will not be long before my fragments will be before you, ready for your perusal.

You have pleaded the cause of the unbeliever in personal immortality well, and almost proved that he, least of all, has reason to fear death. But vain is all your pleading; though all the Muses should combine in singing the praises of an eternal

sleep, yet will man desire immortality. There is something within the human breast that argues so eloquently and forcibly in favor of personal continuance as to bring more conviction than all your wisdom. Here is a problem for you: Why is it that man in all ages has desired, hoped for, and had faith in, immortality? It is the pillar that holds up all religions; without it, they cannot rise; take away this support, and they fall to the ground. It is an inexhaustible fountain of consolation at which all may drink, without itself being diminished.

Surely our intuitions count for something. What we know and feel does not flow alone from our experience, but from a richer and deeper source, namely, our intuition and imagination. When reason fails to perceive the truth, our intuition assures us of it. Man intuitively shrinks from homicide, and as intuitively does he recoil at the idea of annihilation. There is something within us that speaks better, quicker, and more to the point, than our reason; when the brain

is tired, worn out, and in need of rest, this voice within us can be heard, before the poor, sluggish brain has had time to go through the process of reasoning. How quickly this something within our breast takes in the good, the pure, the beautiful, without stopping to take counsel, or to ask reason what really is good, pure, or beautiful. This voice within me has been my true and trusty friend, and surely I may listen, without fear of being deceived, to its sweet accents when it whispers, The soul of man is immortal. Emerson says, "Our progress is an unfolding, like the vegetable bud. You have first an instinct, then an opinion, then knowledge, as the plant has root, bud and fruit. Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason. It is vain to hurry it. By trusting it to the end, it shall ripen into truth, and you shall know why you believe."

Though progressive thought rejects Christianity, though the immutability of the laws of nature cannot fail to impress even a superficial observer, though the theory of

evolution makes it hard for an immortalist to see his way clearly, we may, notwithstanding, hope that some tangible and convincing proof of immortality will yet be discovered. Until we have searched nature through and through, we cannot say that personal continuance is impossible. Are we not ourselves a striking proof of the triumph of personality over the changes of matter? Our mortal body changes not only in death, but also during life. We change so rapidly that a very short time suffices to make us new beings; old atoms are exchanged for new, and the old body is constantly making way for a new body, yet our personality continues; it is always we, ourselves, and no one else. We leave the joys of infancy for those of boyhood; boyhood gives place to the more earnest thoughts and pursuits of manhood; to manhood succeeds old age, with its peculiar joys and sorrows, its weakness and its strength; yet, through all, it is we, ourselves. We all enter this world naked, helpless, hungry, and ignorant, but some have risen to a height truly re-

markable, until like some mighty magnet they attract all within reach of their influence, and their power is felt for ages after their ashes have been laid to rest. What thoughts have chased through their minds ; what emotions have swayed them ; what innumerable pictures have been flashed upon their brain—some, perhaps, so vivid and thrilling, as to affect their whole lives, and, through them, the lives of others. Words are inadequate to describe, we cannot take in all, the changes that a mighty intellect undergoes from the time it enters this world, a helpless sentient being, until it reaches the acme of its power ; and, through all, the personality remains ; it is the same soul, whether it looks through the eyes of infancy, or through those of manhood, or old age.

It seems a little inconsistent that Materialists, while so earnestly maintaining that force and matter are immortal, and that what disappears in one place must reappear in another, in the same breath assert that the soul is annihilated, is lost ; that when death comes, that is the end of man.

In your letter you disposed of my God in rather a summary manner, hardly in keeping with the gravity of such a subject. However, I shall reiterate one of my arguments, and substitute the word Nature in place of God. If Nature out of atoms could unfold the existing universe, if out of *an-organica*, or inorganic matter, she could evolve man, why can she not make man immortal? The phenomena of Nature are so wonderful that we cannot think of anything so impossible but that it may be possible to Nature. We know too well that what to-day is looked upon as wild, visionary, and not befitting the consideration of sensible people, to-morrow may be looked upon as quite feasible, perfectly natural. The ephemera in its one short day of April life cannot tell what bloom, beauty, and perfection the Summer will bring; and so with man: his life is too ephemeral, too fleeting, to view Nature as a whole; and from that which is, he cannot always conceive of that which will be or has been. We read Nature through her works. "I read the soul of

the artist in his Apollo." "Each coming Spring, forcing the sprouts of plants out of the earth, gives me explanation of the awful riddle of death, and contradicts my anxious fears about an everlasting sleep. The swallow that we find stiffened in Winter, and see waking up to life after; the dead grub coming to life again as the butterfly, and rising into the air—all these give excellent pictures of our immortality" (Schiller.)

Do not think because you cannot solve the mystery of immortality that, on that account, it cannot be true. Can you understand how out of sixty-five or seventy simple elements the universe has been developed? Do you not concede myriads of things to be true which you can neither explain nor prove? When we look up and endeavor to penetrate limitless space, must we not curb our proud spirit and say with Winchell, "In the presence of infinity, what can man do but bow his head and worship."

LETTER NO. IV.

FROM HERMAN TO LUCIUS.

YOU are unhappy without your God, though the latter part of your letter shows that you have not yet learned to do entirely without him ; you do not expect any immediate aid from him, yet you have a vague idea that he exists. I sympathize with you deeply. How many sorrows and pains there are which man feels his utter helplessness to avert ! and in his extremity he would implore help of some god-like power, that, man-like, would respect his feelings, and that, god-like, could cause Nature to deal more gently with him. Experience, too, strongly shows that our cries to God for help are unavailing, otherwise there is not an Infidel born who would not willingly call upon God and angels to protect his loved ones.

Do not blame me for pushing aside the veil, and laying the truth bare before you. I dare not do otherwise ; deception is too dangerous a foe of mankind to make me wish to

cultivate it, and, believe me, sugar-coated pills are always the bitterest in the end.

I think I have found the solution to the problems you have given me, though I could wish to have it presented to you by a more able mind than mine. First we will see how much reliance is to be placed on our intuitions, of which you speak with so much confidence.

To have an intuitive perception of the truth, independent of all human experience, man must possess innate ideas, and through these he is supposed to arrive at a knowledge of things independent of sensuous experience. I cannot think of an instance where man can gain any knowledge independent of sensuous experience, the original source of all knowledge. On the contrary, the action of the soul is bound fast to that of the senses. The blind cannot know colors, the deaf cannot know sounds. What can intuition teach the poor blind, deaf mute about God and immortality? All history is known either directly or indirectly through experience.

If we possess innate ideas, why is it that

there is so little uniformity ; that we do not agree only where reason can bring plain, comprehensive, and undeniable proof.

Plato's heaven was for philosophers ; that of the early Christians for the poor and ignorant ; the Mohammedan's heaven is an abode of sensual delights ; and that of the Indian a happy hunting-ground. All nations have made a heaven to suit their own peculiar tastes and fancies.

Æsthetical, moral, and metaphysical notions are certainly very contradictory, and, unless guided by reason, utterly unreliable.

Let us see a few of the caprices intuition indulges in concerning the beautiful. Our ideas of the beautiful are very apt to vary with every changing fashion. This point is well enough illustrated by our American people. The Chinese admire very fat women, with feet so small that they can scarcely walk ; the Americans prefer women of slight, ethereal form—though since tight-lacing is out of date their ideas in this respect have become somewhat modified. Some nations admire a black complexion, and a flat nose

in which rings are hung—a sight disgusting to us. Savages paint and tattoo their bodies, and make many efforts to beautify themselves, which in our eyes only add to their hideousness.

Moral ideas are the result of gradual experience and development. The moral ideas of man in a state of nature are very crude, and often revolting. He is ignorant, and intuition does not help him distinguish the good, the beautiful, and the pure. It is only after many generations that he acquires through inheritance a highly moral nature; he then becomes in a considerable degree organically moral. You quote from Emerson, “Trust the instinct to the end, though you can render no reason,” etc. The Fejeeans trust their instinct when they strangle their aged parents and relatives; they think they are doing a laudable act; they expect to enter the next world exactly as they are when leaving this; therefore, children consider it a kindness to strangle parents before infirmity sets in. The aborigine of Brazil, it is said, de-

voured their relatives, as a mark of honor. The lowest savages consider great and glorious such acts as lying, murder, theft, and cannibalism.

Man emerges from this savage state when he can reap the benefit of the experience and spiritual struggles of long generations of ancestors. Hæckel says, "Knowledge which is based originally upon purely empirical observations, and which is therefore a purely sensuous experience, but has been transmitted from generation to generation by inheritance, appears in later generations as if it were independent, innate, and *a priori*." The virtues practiced by our ancestors have helped build up our moral nature, therefore we cannot prize too highly every good and wise thought or act; neither can we too much fear ignorance and the practice of evil; the former makes us noble and happy; the latter leads to degeneracy and ruin.

We inherit predispositions; and on most questions of morality we either have an opinion, or have accepted the opinions of

others, so that a highly moral being quickly feels what is right and what is wrong, without continually going through the whole process of reasoning.

You ask, "Why is it that man in all ages has desired, hoped for, and had faith in immortality?" There have been more men without faith in immortality than you, perhaps, imagine; and if the skeptics on this subject have been comparatively few, there are many good reasons for it. What a weapon this threat of hell is; it has forced conviction through fear, rather than reason, and many have believed only in order to be on the safe side. The instinctive love of life is so strong that, even though death claims all living forms as his victims, and we must submit in reality, yet in imagination we defy him; then add to this the desire of again meeting and recognizing our lost loved ones. We are only too willing to believe in personal continuance; our desire to prove it true is so intense that we can hardly examine the subject impartially and without prejudice. It is only when we can

deceive ourselves no longer, that we are satisfied to work for a heaven in the present, instead of waiting for one in the future.

Though Plato is most eloquent on the immortality of the soul, yet has he put into the mouth of Socrates the following forcible words: "Now, if you suppose that there is no consciousness but a sleep, like the sleep of him who is undisturbed even by the sight of dreams, death will be an unspeakable gain. For if a person were to select the night in which his sleep was undisturbed even by dreams, and were to compare with this the other days and nights he had passed in the course of his life, better and more pleasantly than this one, I think that any man, the Great King even, will not find many such days or nights, when compared with these. Now, if death is like this, I say that to die is gain, for eternity is then only a single night." David did not have much faith in a hereafter, and endeavored to persuade God, on that account, to deliver him in sickness. "For in death," said the Psalmist, "there is no remembrance of thee :

in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" Psalm vi, 5.

"O spare me that I may recover my strength, before I go hence and be no more." Psalm xxxix, 13.

Mirabeau, the French statesman, the morning of his death uttered the following memorable words: "My friend, I shall die to-day. When one has come to such a juncture, there remains only one thing to be done: that is, to be perfumed, crowned with flowers, and surrounded with music in order to enter sweetly into that slumber from which no one awakens."

The religion established by Moses did not teach immortality. The Mosaic doctrine was introduced among the children of Israel when they were ignorant slaves and idolators, and under this system a nation developed whose religion, history, and literature have influenced the whole Christian world. Buddhism, which in its numerous varieties is still the religion of a large portion of mankind, preaches non-existence as the highest object of deliverance; from this,

however, it does not necessarily follow that all Buddhists teach or believe this doctrine. In all probability, the different sects, like those of Christianity, teach diametrically opposed doctrines, leaving each individual to take his choice. But nothing better illustrates the fact that faith in immortality is not an innate and incontrovertible idea than the present age. Everywhere we meet with Materialists. Germany, which is called, and perhaps with some justice, "Die cultur Nation der Welt," counts among the unbelievers in personal continuance many of its greatest intellects. Even in this country Materialists are to be found in all grades of society. True, they are comparatively few, but still sufficient for our argument. We have also a class whose belief is materialistic, only they have retained old names, and substituted new meanings. By them Nature is called God; force is called soul; and the immortality of force, the immortality of the soul.

No doubt the desire for immortality generally outlives the faith in immortality.

The desire is the result of one of our strongest instincts, namely, love of life. This feeling causes man to plant hope on the grave, and imagination extends the hope into the infinite. It is life that all animate forms, both animals and plants, are struggling for, and man is reluctant to let go his hold even in death. Die he must, but he can go on the road to his grave blindfolded, while he fills his soul with pictures drawn by imagination; alas for him! the illusive pictures of imagination, when unguided by reason, are often more horrible, and certainly more to be dreaded, than the sternest reality.

I think the desire for immortality can be explained by the law of the "survival of the fittest." Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and those who do not love life enough to struggle for it must in time succumb to the more vital and life-loving. The struggle for existence that has been going on for so many generations has built up and strengthened this instinct, so that we have inherited it in all its present force

and power. In past ages, some men have so ruthlessly and selfishly indulged this instinct that they hated and persecuted all who dared in any way disturb their calm and satisfied contemplation of a life of eternal happiness for themselves and of eternal misery for others.

It is true that the belief in a conscious immortality stands, in spite of the weakness of its support; men entertain this hope, no matter how unreasonable or improbable. Instinct demands life, and causes aspiration after an eternal life; it is little concerned whether its demands satisfy reason or not; and pure reason also passes its decrees without troubling itself whether its decisions will satisfy the sensuous nature or not.

People haunted with the intolerable dread of death have attempted to discover an elixir of life; they believed in it, no matter how unreasonable; they desired it, no matter how futile; and, no doubt, even now, the majority of mankind would be willing to exchange their shadowy future for a real (were such a thing possible) elixir which

would guarantee the possessor a life of a thousand years' duration. Thus we see man's reason and instinct are not always in harmony ; and, perhaps, in this case, the mental struggle is one of the fiercest the human race has to undergo.

You think that because man's personality triumphs over so many changes it can triumph over all. Have you reflected, my dear Lucius, that all animals possess personality? and that if we follow up your train of reasoning, we shall be led to the conclusion that the number of the immortals will be composed mostly of the lowest forms of animals? The personal soul of no animate form is immortal—for was it not non-existent during a whole eternity?

You argue wrongly when you say that nothing is impossible with Nature ; and that if she can make you out of clay, she can make you imperishable. Nature is not a God, and she cannot do everything ; her laws are mechanical, they are immutable, and regard neither the tears nor prayers of humanity. True, the wonders of Nature are

inexhaustible, and scarcely perceptible forces can produce great effects. We must not, however, limit ourselves as to time—it is ample. Mountains are leveled, islands rise and sink; everywhere is change and mutation; but all must happen in harmony with the laws of Nature. A piece of lead not supported must always fall toward the center of the earth; neither God nor Nature can alter this law.

It is very easy to assert that until we have searched Nature through and through we cannot say that personal continuance is impossible. The same might be argued in favor of many wild, visionary, and improbable notions. Suppose I were to tell you that it had been revealed that somewhere in space there existed a magic stone, no larger than an ordinary egg; that at death this magic stone attracted the departing spirit, and bore it to an island on some far-distant planet. No one can prove this; still you cannot disprove it until you have searched all space.

Do you regret that philosophy destroys

many a long-cherished hope? The loss is not so great, after all; for, even if the soul were immortal, the present only is ours; more than this the gods themselves cannot claim. If we are happy now, our happiness is as great as if we had been happy from all eternity. Death need no longer concern us: "For where we are, death is not; and where death is, we are not."

On the other hand, we have much to gain: in place of an imaginary hereafter, we can more firmly clasp and adapt ourselves to the dear reality; we shall find ourselves constrained to strive for a heaven on this earth, where we shall endeavor to live happy days, instead of dreaming of them; where we shall practice virtue, in order to become moral, instead of waiting to practice virtue until God shall make us moral. Truth is always a gain; the more man understands his true place in nature, the better will he be able to resolve the discords that surround him into harmony.

MATERIALISM.

MATERIALISM.

THE NAKED DOCTRINE.

THE ancient Greeks clothed all natural phenomena with living attributes. Sunset was the sun growing old, and dying ; sunrise was night giving birth to a child of light. Mountains, grottos, forests, rivers, fountains, rain, storm, and thunder were filled with the supernatural. The air must have been oppressive, laden with the breath of invisible spirits. Man trembled before the creations of his own imagination ; he listened with fear to the whispering wind ; he watched with dread the fleeting clouds ; he looked upon the various phases of nature as being caused at the pleasure or caprice of the gods. The Greek had not yet studied nature in search of truth, but took the easier way, and drew upon his imagination for the explanation

of all phenomena. To him, health, life, and happiness were bestowed by good spirits ; pain, misfortune, and death were inflicted by evil spirits. In this way questions were solved which to-day occupy the minds of our greatest scientists.

As the Greeks became closer observers of nature, the age of the supernatural began to wane ; secluded spots were no longer enchanted ; the incantations of the sorceress were without effect ; miracles ceased, and the oracles as well as the gods became mute. When these questions, which occupied the minds of men in all ages, were asked : “ Whence came I ? ” “ Whither am I tending ? ” they could not be answered as heretofore by the words of the oracle, or the revelations of the gods, for these had been found to be symbols of ignorance instead of truth. Science was not yet far enough advanced to build up in place of what had been demolished : skepticism superseded the gods, and for a time reigned supreme. Men began to doubt their very existence, the existence of anything, and to look upon everything as a

dream and an illusion. Nor is this to be wondered at ; imagination had so long misled them that they began to think there were no means of arriving at the truth.

Infidelity and skepticism were the dawn of science in Greece ; the trammels of superstition had been thrown off, which left a full enjoyment of liberty of thought. Very rapidly the conviction grew strong that events were not brought about by the interposition of the divine power of the gods, but that they were the unfailing consequences of general laws. Astonishing progress was made in science, and very soon theories of life and death were evolved similar to those of the present day. Darwin, in his "Origin of Species," very gracefully acknowledges that the principle of natural selection was "shadowed forth" by Aristotle, and in a note he says : "Aristotle, after remarking that rain does not fall in order to make the corn grow, any more than it falls to spoil the farmer's corn when threshed out of doors, applies the same argument to organization." It would appear from the

above that Aristotle did not see design in nature ; and the mode of reasoning is analogous to that of some of the writers of the present day, as, for instance, birds did not receive wings to enable them to fly, but they fly because they have wings. Examples of this kind could be given covering many pages. That part of Darwin's quotation from Aristotle which seems to apply more directly to the principle of natural selection is as follows : "Wheresoever, therefore, all things together (that is, all the parts of one whole) happened like as if they were made for something, these are preserved, having been appropriately constituted by an internal spontaneity ; and whatsoever things were not thus constituted, perished and still perish."

Zeno, the great stoic, a cotemporary of Aristotle, said (as given in Draper's "Conflict Between Religion and Science") : "We must remember that every thing around us is in mutation ; decay follows reproduction, and reproduction decay ; and that it is useless to repine at death in a world where

everything is dying." And again: "Nothing is eternal but space, atoms, force. The forms of nature that we see are essentially transitory; they must all pass away." We here see an acknowledgment of the law of change, and a rejection of the idea of creation; what is called creation is only a generating of life from death, a reproduction which follows decay. Although all the forms of nature that we see pass away, the matter of which they are composed remains. Nothing being eternal but atoms, space, and force, there can be no such thing as creation, for all that is transitory is generated from the eternal.

About six hundred years after the time of which we have been writing, Rome was also ripe for a change; and as she had accepted Grecian mythology, so she would have accepted Grecian science, had it not been for that combination ever ruinous to public liberty—monarchy and Christianity. Religious fanaticism has ever been ready to fill the coffers, and recruit the armies of tyrants. Constantine, the first Christian

emperor, was not slow to perceive this. Notwithstanding ecclesiastical history ascribes the conversion of Constantine to a miracle, seen with his own eyes during one of his marches, namely, the celestial sign of the cross inscribed with the words, "By this conquer," it is more probable that he placed himself at the head of the Christian party for his own aggrandizement. There is no doubt Christianity gave Constantine adherents whose sabers were sharpened with religious zeal, and who were ready to encounter fire and sword in his behalf. Without these religious enthusiasts, he would never have worn the imperial purple.

It is remarkable that, during the reign of Constantine, heresy was so rife, even though miracles were performed to confirm the truth. Gibbon tells us that a new creed sprung up with every new moon. One of the principal causes of dispute was concerning the Trinity, some claiming that the Son was not coequal with the Father; others that he was not infinite, but that, according to the nature of things, the Son

must be younger than the Father. All disputes of this character were settled by synods; and if the doctrines were declared erroneous, those professing them had their property confiscated, and were themselves thrown into disgrace, and their leaders exiled. That these synods at one time accepted as a part of the creed what at another time they condemned, Arianism affords sufficient proof. At one time, according to the conflicting decrees of the Council of Bishops, the gates of Heaven were only open to those who believed the Son to be consubstantial with the Father; at another time, such a belief was sacrilegious.

The Christians could not tolerate the study of philosophy, because it was too often the parent of heresy and unbelief. The philosophic mind rejects all evidence of a supernatural character, and this is the only evidence that can be brought forward in favor of Christianity. It rests on no better foundation than Buddhism, Mohammedanism or any of the various forms of religious belief. It makes unbelief the greatest of all

crimes, and therefore could not consistently, and, as history amply proves, did not, tolerate the light of science. About A. D. 400, Hyapatia, a philosopher, fell a victim to the Christian antagonism to science. She delivered lectures in Alexandria, and among other subjects discussed the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. Her lecture-room was thronged, but most so when her subject had a bearing on those two mysteries—life and death. This learned and courageous woman had yet to learn that all such questions were decided by revelation after it had undergone interpretation by the Church. A number of zealous monks conspired against her, pulled her out of her chariot, dragged her to a church, and there murdered her; with religious frenzy her flesh was scraped from the bones, and her members gathered together and consumed by fire. The perpetrators of this atrocious crime were not punished.

Thus, we see, philosophy was listened to with avidity by the Romans. The decay of paganism, and the general skepticism

and ridicule felt for the old superstitions—all these had prepared the Roman mind for philosophy, and had it not been for Christian intolerance combined with monarchical power, Grecian science would not have become extinct, only to be revived at this late day.

The Christian world, like Greece three hundred years before Christ, is fast outgrowing her ancient faith. Germany, the cradle of the Reformation, has also become the cradle of modern skepticism, and from there it has spread and taken deep root all over Europe and America.

In the first ages of Christianity skepticism was punished with death ; but slowly the truth dawned upon men that the only safety for humanity is liberty of thought—for the belief of to-day may become the heresy of to-morrow.

Our orthodox forefathers were very wise. Questions that to-day puzzle our greatest intellects they solved according to revelation with the utmost ease. They talked of the creation as if they had been present on the occasion ; of the future abode of the elect as

if they had been there and taken an inventory. Miracles were of frequent occurrence, and no one dared doubt them ; but it is to be regretted that now, when religion is in danger, and miracles are most needed, they have entirely ceased.

Being more profoundly impressed with our ignorance than our forefathers were, the two mysteries—life and death—again engage our most earnest attention.

Life surrounds us in endless variety, bestowed by the lavish hand of Nature. Vegetable life invites our admiration. Green meadows, shady groves, the hillside covered with wild herbs and flowers ; the landscape as far as the eye can reach is covered with vegetation. The variety interests us, and recalls to our minds having read somewhere that it is supposed there are 25,000 vegetable species, and the number of animal species has been estimated at 30,000. The vegetable kingdom covers the earth with beauty, and so fills our sight that we can hardly realize that the animal kingdom exceeds it both in size and variety.

A drop of water seen through a microscope will be found to swarm with living beings in active motion. These infusoria, which are not discernible with the naked eye, abound in every lake, ditch, or pool ; in fact, wherever air, heat, and moisture work together, a few moments will suffice to develop countless numbers of these wonderful and minute forms of animal life. Mountain, forest, ocean, river—the whole earth is pregnant with organic life. It presses in wherever there is room and encouragement, under an infinite variety of conditions, and, consequently, in an infinite variety of forms. Death follows with unfailing certainty. This is one of the immutable decrees of nature.

It has been the popular belief that this earth only is the theater of life and death ; that the sun was placed in the heavens to give light by day and the moon to give light by night, and that the starry firmament was to separate the earth from the abode of angels and gods. The telescope has removed the dwelling-place of spirits to an inconceivably remote distance. With the

increased power of the telescope, new astral systems have been discovered, and others will, no doubt, still continue to be discovered, as there can be no limit to these systems; for not only is our solar system kept in its place by other systems, but these in turn by still others, and so on without end.

Since the discovery of spectrum analysis, it has been found that the heavenly bodies are composed of the same elements as our earth. Professor Kirchhoff says, "Matter and forces in the whole universe are essentially identical."

Who shall say how many worlds there are, inhabited by beings similar to ourselves, and even superior, for, in the words of the poet laureate of England—

"This truth within thy mind rehearse—
That in a boundless universe
Is boundless better, boundless worse."

Nature includes everything, and on her organic life is dependent for all that is necessary to existence—light, air, water, food, etc. The supernatural has never for an instant asserted itself above Nature.

When I am standing on terra firma, I do not need the supernatural to keep me from sinking; when I am not near the fire, I do not need the supernatural to keep me from burning; when I have an abundance of food, I do not need the supernatural to keep me from starving. But if I am in the water, shall I not sink? If I am in the fire, shall I not burn? Without food, shall I not starve? As long as Nature preserves me, I do not need the supernatural, but when Nature no longer preserves me, I may look in vain for help elsewhere. We owe all conditions and circumstances, whether good or evil, death or continuance of life, to Nature, and shall we also not look to her for our origin?

That the world did not come into existence in its present condition has been scientifically established, and can no longer be denied. Some acknowledge this fact reluctantly; others, who hold the so-called theory of Evolution in its fullest extent, believe not only that the world, but all that is in it, did not originate in its present

developed state ; still further, that all organic forms, from the lowest up to man, have developed from living microscopic particles.

There was a time, it is believed, when the earth was a fiery globe, incapable of producing, and fatal to the existence of, animal organisms. After it had gradually cooled down, and those conditions were brought about which render vegetable and animal life possible, a few moments would suffice for the earth, by means of air, heat, and moisture, to develop organic life.

The geological record shows that the earth has teemed with living beings through incalculable periods of time, the lowest types appearing first. From this we naturally conclude that the lowest forms have passed into the higher forms by slight and imperceptible transitions, and almost every science contributes knowledge to strengthen this conclusion, more particularly that department of natural history called Morphology. Morphology teaches that each great class of animals and plants is constructed on the

same general plan ; as, for instance, the arm of a man, the fore-limb of a quadruped, the wing of a bat, the fin of a fish, all contain the same essential parts, modified and adapted to widely different uses, according to the habits of the animal. So we see man did not come from the hands of God a perfect being, but was brought forth by his mother, Nature, with many pangs, and after long ages of labor.

As our knowledge increases, the conviction becomes stronger that Nature has done everything. She has entirely relieved God of the labor of creation. Evolution explains that vegetable and animal organisms originated in a natural manner without the aid of a supernatural power or agency. Man, the highest type of the animal kingdom, has been developed, through vast periods of time, from the simplest beginnings, thus connecting him to his mother earth by a chain, the links of which differ one from the other, if it be only as much as a varying fiber. Never can man sever this endless, intricate chain, for "Dust

thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return."

The organic forms of matter having come into existence in a natural manner, it may be asked, how did matter come into existence? Matter is immortal, indestructible, and can neither be created nor annihilated. "An atom of iron," quotes Buchner, "remains, at all events the same thing, no matter whether it thunders along the railroad track in the wheel of the locomotive, or flies through the air in a meteor, or courses in a blood-cell through the temporal veins of a poet."

There are many things which lead men to believe that matter could be annihilated. Vegetables and animals are constantly disappearing from the surface of the earth, but we all know that nothing is lost, and that decomposition is only a process by which particles of matter change places and assume new forms. A burning taper grows shorter and shorter until at last it is all gone, and apparently destroyed; but this is only apparently so, as the candle has only

been changed into invisible gases, and not one atom has been lost. As matter cannot be annihilated, it could not have been created, and we ourselves are composed of matter as old as infinity.

Man in his search for something upon which to rest his hopes of immortality may reason as follows : Matter cannot be annihilated, and therefore I, who am composed of matter, cannot be annihilated, and consequently I am immortal. This is only one of the phases through which the mind passes in its search after truth, for the indestructibility of matter is the very foundation upon which Materialism rests. If the indestructibility of matter gives immortality, then every worm, insect, and animalcule that has ever existed—in fact, the whole vegetable and animal kingdoms—must be immortal.

Even if matter is immortal, we possess it but a short time, as nature demands every atom ; each generation of animals and plants inherits the matter and force of preceding generations.

There was a time when we did not exist; when nobody knew anything of us and we knew nothing of anybody; and that time will come again, for when we pay our last debt to Nature, and she deprives us of our bodies, she must also deprive us of our souls. How can the one exist without the other?

There is no force without matter, and the soul would soon waste away were it not for the constant supply of matter through the organism of nutrition. Those who suffer from anæmia, a morbid condition of the blood, are sometimes suddenly attacked with syncope, or swooning. The patient loses consciousness and a deadly pallor overspreads the countenance. Physicians tell us this condition is but a slight remove from death. Why has the soul so suddenly lost its power? It is because the equilibrium between waste and supply is imperfect; because the supply of blood to the head is defective.

We often hear of the power of mind over matter, and in confirmation of this

hypothesis instances are cited where people prostrated by sickness have, under the influence of some powerful emotion, exhibited great mental and physical force. The smoldering embers of a fire may be fanned into a flame with the bellows; the force now given out is greater, but the fuel will much sooner be wasted. So, under sudden emotions, the breath is drawn more quickly and a greater quantity of oxygen inhaled, combustion takes place more rapidly, and the circulation of the blood is increased: we now have greater force, but the fuel is much sooner consumed, and unless the supply can be increased, exhaustion and sometimes death follow.

The ordinary aim of education has been to subjugate the mind, and when the mind first emerges from this thralldom it is beset with many doubts and fears, hardly daring to trust its newly-developed power, like the young bird which lingers and flutters, ere it dare trust its trembling wings in flight. It is only after we have freed ourselves from religious slavery that we can enjoy

our existence to its fullest extent. We then have nothing to fear from a future; our morals will no longer be regulated by the smiles and frowns of imaginary beings, but will rest upon a real and firm foundation. We shall be free to follow whatever code of morals brings most happiness to man.

PRAYER.

PRAYER.

“WHAT! you do not believe in prayer!” our religious friends exclaim in holy horror, and often in a spirit of ill-concealed prejudice against all unbelievers. “How shall we escape punishment for our sins, if not through prayer? What better talisman can a child have against temptation and evil influence than a mother’s prayer? In our extremity, when all else has failed, on whom shall we call for help and comfort, if not on God? If no one believed in prayer, selfishness would reign supreme, and all the evil passions to which human nature is heir would be let loose, flooding the world with crime.”

All this appeals very strongly to our sympathies, but influence for good is as effective, and our earnest aspirations are of

as much avail, without a superstitious belief in prayer as with. Reason gives to morality a firm foundation, which will survive even though the head is no longer bowed in supplication to Deity; morality will only rest the more securely on this true foundation when the world is prepared to dispense with the artificial props that superstition lends.

There is no escape from punishment for sin, that is, from a natural punishment. Wrong acts must generate evil consequences, both externally and internally: internally they degrade us, and draw us down in the scale of humanity, as surely as right acts elevate and ennoble us. Externally they militate against the welfare and happiness of the race, and on the welfare and happiness of the race depends that of the individual. We should cultivate our conscience with the greatest care, we should attune it to the utmost delicacy of sensibility, so that it may take the alarm, and warn us, when we do not act in such a manner as to deserve happiness; we should then become

organically moral, instead of vacillating between fear of hell and evil desires.

A young man chooses his sphere of action ; to enter it he must leave home ; he strives and struggles onward, or he will be left behind in the race ; his strength seems strained to its last tension ; he has always been animated with a lively love for his parents, and the desire to prove a worthy son will inspire him to renew his efforts more effectually than if the parents should assail heaven night and day to send strength to their son.

Death claims its victim, and snatches one dear to us ; one of whose sympathy and wise counsel we were always sure ; one the tones of whose voice has caused the blood to flow more rapidly through our veins, and whose companionship has made life happy. There is nothing left but the likeness molded in clay, and that will soon be laid in a coffin, and then in a narrow grave, and the Mother Earth pressed close around. In this our extremity we seek help to bear our grief ; prayer will not bring us

a supernatural comfort ; all the comfort we receive must come from Nature. To mourn is natural, and as long as human beings possess that noblest of all feelings—love—the void that the loss of a loved one causes will be felt. Whether we exclaim, “Thy will be done,” or whether we let reason assert its sway, and say death is inevitable and we must be consoled, both exclamations are actuated by our knowledge of the immutability of the decrees of Nature. Had we the power to snatch our loved ones from death, we should not exclaim, “Thy will be done.”

Lawless characters are often frightened into a temporary reform ; they have no real desire to live good, moral lives ; they would much prefer a life of lawlessness ; but they wish to escape hell, and they use prayer as a means to attain their object. If these same characters, through reason, were made to appreciate morality, and were inspired with an earnest desire to ennoble themselves, they could be brought to a much higher standard of virtue and justice.

In a real, genuine prayer, we call to our assistance God, expecting him to do for us what no other power can; but what avails it: the simultaneous prayers of the whole world would not be answered with a miracle. For liberty we have fought our own battles, and spilled our own blood; sin has made man weep, and his own flesh has felt the pain, gradually teaching him to avoid sin. The wife on bended knees implores God to protect her soldier-husband, but even while she prays the bullet speeds on its way and passes through her loved one's brain.

Though petitions to Deity bring about no objective effect, yet their subjective influence cannot be denied; but the simple aspirations of the heart bring about the same results, and, it would seem to us, in a better way. If one invokes the aid of God to make himself better, and sincerely wishes it—which is not always the case, for prayers are sometimes unmeaning ceremonies—he has certainly gained much. On the other hand, he who earnestly desires

to become better, and yet expects no supernatural aid, must feel that it is not sufficient to know and desire what is good, but that he must practice it without delay; and that if he does not, there is no God to bear the responsibility for him.

Many cling to prayer who do not expect any other than natural results; they use it in order to give vent to the longings of the heart, the play of the feelings, and to inspire with goodness. We dare not scoff at this, for we are morally bound to respect the feelings of every human being, and to sympathize with their struggles and heart-throbbings, and in return we have a right to demand the same. The good that is effected by prayer we attain through other means, and at the same time from such sources as will not prevent us from being honest to ourselves, and toward others. The means are everything that is good, pure, and true, and their use is regulated by circumstances and personal disposition. In music we give vent to the longings of the heart, in poetry to the play of the feel-

ings : reason and the practice of virtue teach and inspire goodness.

If we would every day renew our determination to be more philanthropic, and earnestly desire to create in our hearts a greater love toward mankind, this would be a divine aspiration, whether felt by Mohammedan or Christian, and offered up in the form of a prayer, or whether honestly felt by an Infidel, and not offered up to any of the gods.

DISADVANTAGES OF DEBATING
WITH RELIGIONISTS.



DISADVANTAGES OF DEBATING WITH RELIGIONISTS.

LIBERAL thinkers labor under many disadvantages in carrying on a religious argument with their orthodox friends. Sectarians claim that we are blinded by the devil ; they would have some difficulty in proving this assertion, though it would be a very easy matter to prove that *they* are blinded by prejudice. As soon as an individual declares himself a skeptic, religionists look upon him as one who is under the influence of an evil spirit, and as one who advocates immorality. Their minds are so biased that they cannot understand that being moral and being religious are widely different things : one may be religious even to fanaticism, and not possess superior goodness ; and one who is not at all religious may possess the greatest excel-

lence. As in Europe true nobility was supposed to exist only among the titled class, so religionists will not give us credit for goodness unless we have a diploma from the minister.

We are constantly confronted with the two great mysteries—life and death; the first we are apt to accept as a gift, without many speculations as to the cause. Some feel happy in possessing life, whereas the majority have not the disposition to feel how sweet life is, but both classes prize and cling to it, and the more tenacious of it the more dread of annihilation. It is this dread of annihilation that makes men cling to religion as a drowning man would cling to a straw. It is so pleasant to them to believe that if they have faith they shall not die, they shall not even lose their identity, but that there is a brilliant future in store for them in the New Jerusalem; which has been so minutely described that they expect to find a luxurious home, a city of pure gold, with walls of jasper garnished with all manner of precious stones. “And there shall be no

more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."

Religionists begin the argument with a preconceived prejudice, looking upon all unbelievers as advocates of immorality. As the debate progresses, if we bring forth arguments calculated to destroy their faith, we are their worst enemies. They love their hallucination, and can hardly help hating those who would take it from them. Even after having well sustained our side of the question, and having proved that there are many things in religion contrary to reason, they will not acknowledge the defeat, but slink out of it by telling us that we are blinded by the devil. The greatest metaphysical efforts, the finest reasoning is answered in this manner.

As soon as we declare ourselves skeptics, we are looked upon as advocates of immorality; the more powerful the arguments we bring forth, the greater influence the evil spirit is supposed to exert over us. Finally, we retire from the debate in disgust, feeling that our arguments have been

unfairly met ; that our reasoning has been looked upon as benighted blindness sent by the devil ; that we have considerably fallen in the estimation of our opponent, and that we have lost a friend, and prejudiced a mind against us.

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